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ABSTRACT

Information on the process of decision-making, hints on how to function in team decision-making, and materials on how to prepare clients for decision-making in team meetings for the beginning level child welfare worker are provided in this self-instructional manual. Techniques are discussed for improving the quality of decisions made by the individual child welfare worker. Questions are provided to help readers determine their personal style of decision-making, and four different approaches to decision-making are described. The differing amounts of information needed before making a decision are briefly outlined, varying levels of abstraction used in problem formulations are considered, and five methods commonly used to make decisions are described. Factors to be considered in deciding to take action regarding a particular case are discussed. A four-phase problem solving process is outlined involving assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Advantages and disadvantages of team decision-making are discussed and the preparation of a case for team decision-making is outlined. Ways to prepare clients and their children for meaningful participation in the team decision-making process are discussed. Finally, the process of team decision-making itself is described. (NRB)

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DECISION-MAKING IN CHILD WELFARE
A SELF INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL

Edited
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REGION VI CHILD WELFARE TRAINING CENTER
TULANE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
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INTRODUCTION

Decisions, Decisions, Always More Decisions

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Training Committee, Region VI Child Welfare Training Center, in their work with Center Staff regarding the needs of workers frequently mentioned the lack of materials to use in training child welfare workers to make decisions and to function in the team decision-making process. Staff reviewed materials available on decision-making and felt that the materials either reported on research projects or assumed that the reader already had worked out a logical method of decision-making. There did not seem to be any materials readily available which simply considered how an individual made a decision in Child Welfare and all of the steps involved.

This self instructional manual attempts to provide the individual worker, especially the beginning worker new to the field, some information on the process of decision-making, some hints on how to function in team decision-making, and some materials on how to prepare clients for decision-making in the team meetings. Please note the pronouns are sometimes mixed to avoid always referring to both worker and client as "she."

Before reading the rest of the manual, please complete the following self assessment of your current learning style. Please be as objective as possible in evaluating your own style of making decisions. It might be helpful if you think of how you make different types of decisions. For example, choosing a horse in a race, selecting a movie or restaurant to go to, renting an apartment, buying a house, selecting someone to date or to marry, and deciding on where to work.

There are four indexes, each one is numbered from 1-4. These four indexes cover the four components of decision-making. Check the answer which comes closer to expressing how you feel you currently make decisions. Add all items checked to obtain your score.

SELF ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Item 1

Approaches to Decision-Making

Almost never makes decisions	Delays making decisions	Makes decisions too quickly	Makes timely decisions
1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____

Item 2

Amount of Information Needed

No information	Exhaustive information	Limited information	Key information
1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____

Item 3

Levels of Abstraction

Concrete	Abstract	More concrete Less abstract	Blending of concrete and abstract
1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____

Item 4

Influenced by Others

Almost never influenced by others	Almost always influenced by others	Frequently influenced by others	Sometimes influenced by others
1	2	3	4
_____	_____	_____	_____

Remember your score _____. We will refer to it in Unit 1.

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Unit One

SELF ASSESSMENT OF DECISION-MAKING STYLE

I never have any problems deciding -
I just take the biggest!

Unit One

SELF ASSESSMENT OF DECISION-MAKING STYLE

Introduction

Everyone makes decisions every day. These decisions can vary from very simple ones, such as, what to wear or eat, to more difficult ones such as whether to apply for a different job, to get married, or to seek a divorce. When the consequences of decision-making are relatively unimportant, the person usually feels little concern. However, when the more difficult decisions are made most people have feelings of inner doubts and anxieties. After making a difficult decision most people feel relieved and hope to be able to sit back and relax. Often people are then surprised to discover that now they are faced with having to make additional decisions which have resulted from their original decision. For example - you have made the difficult decision to remove two children from their home. You are then faced with decisions such as where to place them, how to prepare them for the placement, etc.

Making decisions can be a difficult process for anyone, because in most real life situations there are no ideal solutions, in fact, most decisions are compromises based upon available alternatives. Most of the decisions made in child welfare have significant consequences, and therefore, the making of such decisions is often rather frightening to many workers.

While everyone makes decisions every day, few people stop and think about how they make decisions, or even if there might be a more effective way to reach decisions. The general rule of de-

cision-making can be stated simply as:

Identify the problem

Get the facts

Weigh them

Make a decision

This process of decision-making is supposed to be based upon logic and free from any otuside influences such as values, emotions, or physical well-being. In actual practice, all of us violate this rule both consciously and unconsciously all the time! We influence our decisions in the following ways:

By the problems we select to handle

By the way we define the problem

By the nature and amount of information or facts we try to obtain

By the people we allow into the decision-making process.

Just as we have learned other social behaviors, each of us has learned to make decisions by observing our parents, families, friends, teachers, supervisors, and even by watching our own children trying to make decisions. Frequently our parents, teachers, supervisors, and other people in similar positions have tried to teach us ways of making "good" decisions, or improving our decision-making ability. But have you stopped and thought about how do you make decisions?

Purpose of Manual

The overall purpose of this manual is to improve the quality of decisions made by the individual child welfare worker. In order to achieve this purpose, the manual is designed to provide the worker with a more systematic approach or framework to guide her

in making difficult decisions. However, before beginning to read about ways of improving your decision-making skills, it might be helpful to begin to think about how you make decisions - what your style is, and even to help you identify areas of strengths and weaknesses. In order to help you, the child welfare worker, to do this, the following goals and objectives have been selected:

To introduce the worker to different styles of decision-making.

To provide the worker with enough information to allow him/her to assess her own style of decision-making.

To help the worker identify ways of improving decision-making skills.

To accomplish these goals and objectives this manual provides the child welfare worker with a list of questions to answer in order to determine the individual style of decision-making; a description of four different approaches to decision-making; a brief outline of the differing amounts of information needed before making a decision; a consideration of the varying levels of abstractions used in problem formulations; and, an explanation of the five methods commonly used in decision-making.

Before starting on all of these aspects, it is usually helpful to determine what your personal style of decision-making is. You can do this by asking yourself these questions:

How do I approach decision-making?

How much information do I need before making a decision?

What is the relative level of abstraction that I try to ascertain?

How much am I influenced by others?

What methods or processes do I use most often to reach a decision?

It is important to remember, that just as each person's finger prints all differ, so does one's style in decision-making. It will be most helpful if, as you read the following materials, you try to think honestly and openly how you really do make decisions not what you feel is the "right" way. And how you feel you could strengthen your ability to make decisions.

As mentioned earlier, everyone approaches decision-making in their own way. On different occasions or under different circumstances, you may approach it in various ways. For example, a problem arises in the office, the intake form is to be changed by the first of the following month. You have thought for a long time that the form needed to be revised and simplified. You also fear that if the administrators should change the form they might make it even more cumbersome. Your supervisor asks for your input. If you are tired of the paper work you are doing, you may decide to take time and make the suggestions for change you feel are needed. However, if you are just leaving the building to try and track down a child who has run away form his foster home, you may decide to put off giving your in-put and in fact you may never get around to doing it. Then, when the form is changed and, as you feared, it was made more cumbersome, you may continue to criticize the form without ever having made any suggestions regarding its content and format. Some people never give input.

At the other end of the continuum is the person who is always willing to make decisions, even though they may not have the knowledge or information they need to do so. An example of this could be the administrator who willingly offers to change the intake form but has never actually done an intake nor had to use the

information obtained. Therefore, the changes may or may not be appropriate or helpful.

As a worker, what do you think would be an effective way to handle the problem of changing the intake form? Are there any barriers to what you could do in a situation of this kind? Can the barriers be removed?

How Do You Approach Decision-Making?

Some people are extremely uncomfortable making decisions. In order to avoid this discomfort they develop methods to help them avoid having to make decisions. Other persons do not avoid decision-making. Joseph D. Cooper (1961) in The Art of Decision Making describes some workers and their styles of decision-making which you will probably recognize.

Workers who never make a decision - These are workers who never want to make important decisions. These workers may even be found in positions where it is appropriate or even critical for them to make decisions, but they just don't. They delay making a decision either by shuffling papers on their desks, or asking for more time to decide, etc. The end result is that someone else, quite often the supervisor or another worker, has to go ahead and make the decision - as a result they avoid making a decision that could "turn out to be wrong." But they may be very indignant that a decision was made by someone else.

Workers who delay making decisions - There are also workers who unlike the workers in the first example, will eventually make a decision, but they delay the making of the decision as long as possible. Frequently a crisis may arise and they react to the

crisis situation rather than deciding before the crisis what would be the best plan.

Workers who make decisions too quickly - This group of workers make decisions too quickly. They decide before they even know what the key problems are, or what pertinent information is available. They seem "to just know" or "feel" what to do in this type of situation, without knowing even the basic facts. While it is true that experienced workers can use intuition to help guide them in the decision-making process, it is also true that quick decisions can be based upon prejudices. It is most important to obtain accurate, relevant information regarding a particular client's situation rather then to make decisions too quickly.

Workers who make timely appropriate decisions - In this group are those workers who will make decisions, but prefer to have time to analyze the problem, get appropriate information, weigh the information then decide based upon best alternative available. Even in a crisis situation, they are able to ascertain the important, vital information and can make effective decisions. It is important to remember that it is crucial that workers obtain critical information before making a decision to avoid making decisions which may be based upon prejudices or biases.

How Much Information Do You Need Before Making A Decision?

The amount of information that workers obtain or feel they need to make a decision forms a continuum from no information to exhaustive or too much information.

Amount of Information Needed

No Information ——→ Limited Information ——→ Key Information ——→ Exhaustive Information

Decisions based upon no information - Workers in this group make decisions with little or no information available about the particular case. They just have a "feeling" or past experience has shown them that all 13 year old unmarried girls should give up their babies for adoption. And because of their past experiences they feel this is the best plan for this girl without looking at the particular situation.

Decisions based on limited information - This second group of workers needs some data or information but not a lot. For example, a black infant had been severely beaten and brought into the emergency room by a neighbor. The mother denies having beaten the child, but doesn't know what really happened. The worker figures that the mother, who is black, is the one who is responsible for the care of the child and therfore failed to provide this care, whether or not she actually did the beating (which the worker figures because of the client's minority status that she probably did). Therefore, the child is placed in foster care. Later it is learned that the mother was at work, and it was a boyfriend of the babysitter who did the abusing. Prior to this time, the sitter had provided excellent care for the child.

Decisions based upon key, relevant information - In this group are those workers who search for key information in order to make important decisions. They need to know the who, what, where, when, how and why in order to decide effectively - and even in crisis, they try to get as much "key" information as possible to improve the quality of the decisions. They would have checked the facts in the situation described earlier and not have considered the parent as abusing on the basis of minority status alone.

Decisions based upon exhaustive information - In the fourth group are those workers who continue to want to know all there is to be known and to understand all the facts before making a decision. They want to see all the pieces of the puzzle in place. Even after having the important key information, they continue to want or need more information. They would want to know before returning the child all about the boyfriend of the ex-babysitter even though the client has made new arrangements to place the child in a licensed day care center.

What is the Relative Level of Abstraction that I Try to Ascertain

People approach problem solving, new experiences, and learning situations differently. Many people are more comfortable in dealing with concrete or tangible experiences as opposed to more abstract or theoretical considerations. Frequently in training sessions for child welfare workers, one of the workers will say "we don't want theory, we want stuff we can use." These workers are more comfortable with information that is of a "cook book" nature. That when you receive a child abuse complaint - the worker then does A, B, C, D in order. Workers at the other end of the continuum would be most unhappy if the trainer tried to give them a step by step approach as they would be intrigued by the uniqueness of the person, situation, community, etc. Wherever a worker is located on this continuum, she can improve her skill in either being more concrete and less abstract or less concrete and more abstract leading to the effective level of both concrete and abstract.

Levels of Abstraction

Concrete ----> Mostly Concrete Some abstraction ----> Blending of Concrete & Abstract ----> Abstract

Concrete problem-solving - Some workers are more geared to think and deal with concrete or tangible problems which have concrete or tangible solutions. An example is when a client's house burns down, and she needs a place to live, the worker helps to find her a place to live with her children. The worker does not consider or offer any help with the client's loss of all of her possessions including the pictures of her dead husband.

Mostly concrete with some abstraction - Some workers, while they operate primarily on a concrete basis, will address the needs of certain groups. The workers mentioned above while not attending to the mother's emotional needs may work directly with the young children over the effects of the fire.

Blending of concrete and abstract - The third group are those workers who are able to combine and interrelate the concrete or tangible problems with a degree of human behavior and cause-effect relationships. The worker would automatically help to secure housing for the client and her family but would be attentive to the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of all of the family.

Abstract - At the end of the continuum are those workers who are more comfortable working in abstract areas only. They like to figure out what is going on with the client. They like to analyze the information and much like Sherlock Holmes use their deductive reasoning skills to explain behavior, etc. This group may not be interested in concrete problems regarding health care, feeding of children, improving conditions of the home, etc.

How Much Am I Influenced By Others?

All of us are influenced by others sometimes. However, people vary in the amount that they allow other people to influence their decisions. Many people are unaware of how easily influenced they are. An understanding of the degree that you are influenced by others is particularly important when you involve yourself in team decision-making.

Influenced by Others

Almost Never ——→Sometimes ——→Frequently ——→Almost Always

Almost never influenced by others - There are workers who are almost never influenced by other people. Initially you may feel this is a good way to be--that a person who knows her own mind and doesn't need anyone else to help her make decisions seems ideal. However, there can be some drawbacks to this person's ability to make decisions. None of us has the ability to know all things at all times. Therefore, if you refuse to allow other people to present differing or contrasting ideas from your own, you may be limiting your decision-making ability. While it is important to know what you think and why, it is also good to listen to other co-workers, clients, supervisors, and other relevant people.

Sometimes influenced by others - This group includes those workers who know their own mind, but can be influenced by others who have the needed information upon which to base their conclusions. All of us need to be open to the input of others, but still able to make our own decisions as needed. The use of professional reports by teachers, physicians, psychiatrists, etc., and first hand ob-

servations by parents, fosters, etc., can improve the quality of your decision-making.

Frequently influenced by others - In this group are workers who occasionally make their own decisions, but more frequently are influenced by others - especially people they consider knowledgeable. for example, judges, psychiatrists, psychologists, supervisors, teachers, parole officers, etc. While it is true that all of these people can give important and helpful input to the decision-making process, you, the worker, may have the best and most comprehensive information of all the people who have seen this client. Your assessment may be the most complete.

Almost always influenced by others - These are workers who appear easy to get along with, as they seem most congenial They rarely experss a preference for where to go to lunch, or which movie to see, etc., which then allows others to make the decisions for them. If this person continues this way in a team decision-making session and they are in fact the one who has the most information about the client and should be leading the discussion and decision-making process yet instead are hanging back and will eventually go along with whatever the others decide, such a worker can become a liability to his clients.

What Methods or Process Do You Use Most Often to Reach Decisions?

Everyone develops an individual style of decision-making. But the style developed is much like a recipe. First you take a cup of trial and error, add a teaspoon of intuition, stir in a tablespoon of magical thinking and you have your decision-making style. Some of the different methods commonly used to make de-

cisions are described by Joseph D. Cooper. They include: intuition; trial and error; magical thinking; active experimentation; and systematic or problem solving.

Intuition - Cooper defines intuition as "quick perception of truth without conscious attention or reasoning." One has a 'hunch' as to what the problem is and the answer should be. Intution is a high order of reasoning which uses the person's experience which has been stored and classified, and can be referred to quickly without conscious awareness of doing so.

For intuition to be effective the worker needs to have a large body of experience upon which to draw. Therefore, if the intuitive style is used in decision-making, it must be based upon an adequate storage of past experiences which can be used to help point you in the right direction. You will need factual data to back up your intuitive "hunch" to determine if you were right or wrong.

Trial and Error - This is another very commonly used method in decision-making. It refers to the method of trying one alternative after another until you finally come across one that works. This method is frequently used in foster care placements. If the desired home isn't believed to be available, the child or children are then placed in different foster homes until they finally land in one where the foster parents agree to keep him or them and the child agrees to stay.

Magical thinking - This is a process common in all of us. This is especially common in young children. Magical thinking is when a person thinks that "the answer" will just come to her. If she just thinks about it enough or on the other hand if she gets away from the problem, the answer will suddenly appear; that you don't

have to gather information, weigh the alternatives, etc., just think about it.

Active experimentation - This is the style of people who like to be doing things. They don't like sitting around or passive type experiences. These individuals tend to be extroverts. They prefer to be active with clients and doing things to or for the client. While the trial and error method is similar, the major difference seems to be a high level of activity as opposed to passivity and workers using this style can anticipate outxomes without having to try each idea out.

Systematic or problem solving - This method is particularly helpful when making difficult decisions. It involves four stages:

Assessment - which involves identifying the problem and obtaining relevant information.

Planning - which is deciding what you are going to do to resolve the problem you have identified.

Implementation - refers to the process of putting your plan into action.

Evaluation - is the process of checking back to see if you really had identified the problem, if your plan is working and, if not, what changes you need to make in order to solve the problem.

Approaches to decision-making
Amount of information required for decision-making
Level of abstraction regarding problem resolution
Influenced by others
Process or method of decision-making

Individual Decision-Making Style

The components which make up your individual decision-making style are depicted in the above diagram.

Now that you have been able to think about how you approach decision-making, the styles of decision-making you use most often, and the several ways you could improve your ability to make decisions or to do problem-solving, we could like to have you reassess yourself as to the following four components which help make up your overall decision-making style. Please circle the number which is closest to how you plan to make decisions.

SELF ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Item 1

Approaches to Decision-Making

Almost never makes decisions	Delays making decisions	Makes decisions too quickly	Makes timely decisions
1	2	3	4

Item 2

Amount of Information Needed

No information	Exhaustive information	Limited information	Key information
1	2	3	4

Item 3

Levels of Abstraction

Concrete	Abstract	More concrete Less abstract	Blending of concrete and abstract
1	2	3	4

Item 4

Influenced by Others

Almost never influenced by others	Almost always influenced by others	Frequently influenced by others	Sometimes influenced by others
1	2	3	4

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After you have checked the answer which is closest to how you feel you make decisions, please add the numbers below each heading.

The scores range from a low of 4 to a high of 16. The lower your score, the more you may want to utilize this manual to help you improve your decision-making skills. You may want to compare your answers and score to those in the introduction unit.

DECIDING TO DECIDE

O.K. What lucky decisions get made today?

Unit Two

DECIDING TO DECIDE

Making the decision regarding whether or not to take action on a particular case is a major decision in itself. When you encounter a situation that demands a decision, there are a number of questions you need to ask yourself, in order to know whether to proceed with the client, to refer the case, to postpone it, or simply to reject or refer it. While this is most obviously true in Intake, it also applies to virtually any situation that demands a decision regarding whether, when, and who should become involved.

Objective

To prepare the worker to decide:

- If the situation is one that is appropriate for the agency.
- Who in the agency should be involved.
- When involvement should take place.

The following questions should be answered any time you are preparing to make a decision about deciding to decide:

What are the circumstances or situation which have triggered the need for this decision?

- Why is this a problem today? Why not yesterday? Why not tomorrow?
- What has just happened that has caused this to become a problem which requires a decision to be made now?

What is the background or history of this problem or situation?

- How long has the problem or situation existed?
- How have the people involved in the situation tried to deal

with it?

- What successes or failures have they encountered in trying to solve this particular problem?
- What sources have they sought help from in trying to solve this problem?

What are the relevant laws and the agency's policies that affect this problem?

- Is this a problem appropriate to receive services from your agency, based on current rules and regulations?
- What are the existing guidelines which help determine your decision?

Who should be included in the decision-making process?

- Are other workers in your agency already involved?
- Are other workers outside your agency already involved?
- Who will be affected by the decision? i.e., biological parents, children, foster parents, agency staff, courts, etc.?
- Who are the people who have relevant information that can help in the decision-making process? In addition to the people listed above, you may want to include psychologists, mental health workers, teachers, juvenile court workers, etc.
- Who needs to be involved in the decision-making process--supervisor, worker for the child, biological parents, foster parents, attorneys?

- Who will make the ultimate decision and what type of information will they need to do so?
- Ask yourself if you are the person who has the authority to make these decisions, or will your supervisor or others such as a judge, if it is a court case, need to be involved in the final decision?
- Is this the best time to make a decision?
- Do you have enough information to make a decision now?
- What are the consequences to the people involved if you decide not?
- What would happen if you postponed making the decision?
- Is this a one-time decision or a continuous one?

Making a difficult decision often makes people feel that they will be glad when they make the decision and they can relax. However, when working with children and their families (both biological and foster) few decisions are one-time decisions; most decisions will initiate a chain-reaction of decisions, and will require frequent reconsiderations.

What specialized information is needed in order to make a decision in this particular case?

- Is it possible for your agency to get the information?
- When will the specialized information needed be available?

Asking yourself these questions will help you to decide if it is appropriate and possible for you to make decisions about a particular case.

Exercise

List three of the questions that you, the worker, should ask yourself about the presenting problem that can help you decide if, when, and who should become involved in the problem solving or decision-making process.

1.

2.

3.

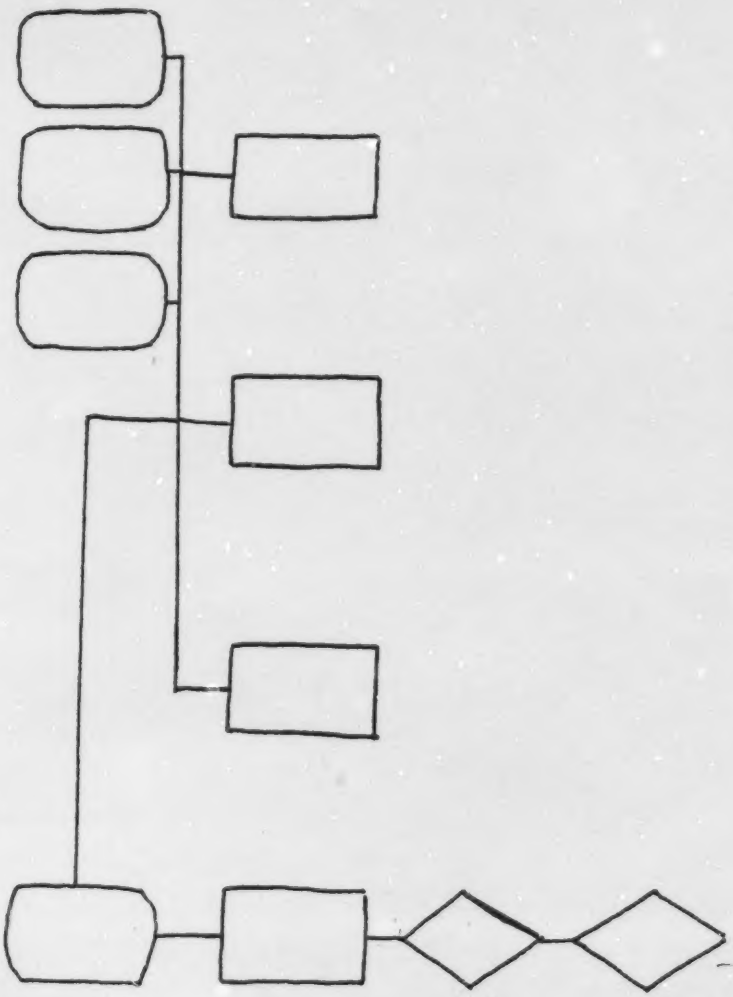
Summary

Deciding to decide or to take action regarding a particular case is an important decision in itself. In order to make this decision you need to look at the factors which surround this problem which can help you understand why this problem is a problem now. Some questions you might find helpful to ask yourself are:

- Can you as a representative of your agency make a decision regarding this case?
- Should you refer the case?
- Who are the relevant parties to the decision-making process?
- Is this the best time to make a decision?
- What specific information is needed in order to make a decision?

Unit Three

HOW TO MAKE A DECISION
A LOOK AT THE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS



Where to start?

Where to start?

Unit Three

HOW TO MAKE A DECISION: A LOOK AT THE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

Once a decision has been made that you, as the agency representative, will get involved, what do you do? The purpose of this section is to give you a framework for what to do next, and how to do it. The framework is the problem-solving process. Systematic problem-solving has four stages. They are assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation.

Objectives

There are four objectives for the child welfare worker in the problem-solving process:

Assessment: to learn howto accurately identify the real problem and to get as much information about the problem as possible.

Planning; to learn how to use the information gathered in the assessment stage to identify alternative solutions, consider all implications of each solution, and decide what to do.

Implementation: to carry out the plan, to work with the clients and to manage all systems involved in the plan.

Evaluation: to determine if the plan was carried out; what the impact on the problem was; and if further problem-solving is needed.

The Process of Assessment

This is the most important step in the problem-solving or decision-making process. In order to resolve a problem, or to make a good decision, you need to identify the problem accurately. This is the 'study' in the traditional 'study-diagnosis-treatment'

followup model of casework. There are two key purposes to this step. First, it is imperative that the right problem be attacked. Second, once the problem is properly identified, you need to know a lot about the problem in order to solve it effectively. Following are some questions to help you 'study' the problem.

Is the problem identified the real one? Or is it a symptom of the problem? Which is cause and which is effect?

What are the various factors contributing to the situation, which need to be changed?

Is there one factor which affects all the others?

Is there a legal aspect to the case?

Is one problem life threatening?

Is one problem more important to the client?

Once the problem to be solved has been identified, it must be thoroughly analyzed. By interviewing the client, observing the situation, making collateral contacts, and obtaining evaluations and reports from other agencies, determine the following:

How urgent or dangerous is the situation? The more urgent or dangerous, the more quickly you must act.

What factors are contributing to the problem?

What factors are helping to contain the problem?

In assessing, remember to look for strengths as well as weaknesses, for positives as well as deficits.

The Process of Planning

Once a problem has been identified and is understood, making a plan to solve it is the next step. In reality this involves

two parts. First, alternative solutions must be found and compared. Second, once the appropriate solution is chosen, a plan for implementing it must be developed.

What are all the possible solutions?

-Brainstorming can be an effective way to generate more ideas for solving the problem. See the Appendix for a brief overview of how to brainstorm, cluster, and rank ideas. Then weigh each idea against each other.

-Once alternative solutions are identified, they should be compared for the following:

How well each solution solves the problem;

How feasible each is to carry out; what resources are needed? What time frame is involved?

What are the possible drawbacks? Negative consequences?

How committed the client is to each.

-A choice must be made regarding the specific solution to be tried. The client should be part of this decision.

When a choice has been made, a plan for its implementation is needed. This plan should become a written contract between the agency and the client, and should become a major part of the case record. The plan is the blue print or road map that, if followed, should implement the chosen solution and, hopefully, solve the identified problem. It should cover the following items:

Statement of the problem.

Statement of solution chosen.

Identification of

who is going to do

what

when with regard to the solution.

-Identification of how the worker, client, and other "actors" in the plan will know 'when' 'who' did 'what.'

-What happens if someone does not do what the plan says.

-When and how the plan will be assessed to determine if it has been carried out, and what the results were; or if changes need to be made in order to become more feasible, or to solve the problem better.

The Process of Implementation

Now that you have made a plan, you must carry it out. The process of implementing a plan requires the use of all of the skills that you have acquired as a child welfare worker. You must be able to:

-Interview clients.

-Understand feelings.

-Work with the clients as they work through the things they are supposed to do.

-Encourage them to persevere.

-Understand failure.

-Mobilize all the resources in the client's network.

-Advocate for the client.

-Record carefully all attempts to implement the plan.

In brief, the child welfare worker must use all of his/her casework skills of support, acceptance, confrontation, education, advise, etc., to carry out all of the elements of the plan.

The Process of Evaluation

The last part of the process involves determining where you are in relation to carrying out the plan and solving the problem.

Evaluation does both of these, as well as helping you decide whether to look at the original situation and to identify other problems to solve. The evaluation stage, therefore, should be setup in the plan. At that point(s), the following should be addressed:

-Was the plan followed? If not, why not? What was done?

-What was the result? Was the problem solved?

-Did new or unanticipated problems arise? If so, were they caused by activities generated by the plan, or something else?

-What is the current status of the situation which involved the agency in the first place?

-Is further action by the agency or the client possible? Desired by both parties?

Based on the answers to the above questions, a decision must be made regarding whether to begin the problem-solving process over again or not.

Exercise

What are the four stages in the problem solving process?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Summary

After a decision to make a decision has been made, it is helpful to have a framework or systematic way of reaching decisions.

The problem-solving process is an extremely useful way to help you make good decisions. There are four stages to the problem-solving process: assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Unit Four

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES
OF
TEAM DECISION-MAKING

You decide; no, you decide; no, you decide.

Unit Four

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TEAM DECISION-MAKING

In most situations, there are no perfect solutions. Most decisions are compromises based on the available alternatives. Decision-making in teams can help to improve the quality of decisions as well as to increase the team member's commitment to the decisions. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to show you the advantages and disadvantages of team decision-making.

Objectives

To insure that the child welfare worker can list the advantages and potential pitfalls of working in a team.

To insure that the worker can identify what is different about team decision-making.

Definition of Team

A team can be defined as "a group of people each of whom possesses particular expertise; each of whom is responsible for making individual decisions; who together hold a common purpose; who meet together to communicate, collaborate, and consolidate knowledge, from which plans are made, actions determined and future decisions influenced." (Brill, 1976, p. 22).

The Advantages of Working in a Team

There are a number of advantages of working in a team. The most frequently cited are:

- The use of the team allows participation of the client in making decisions about his/her own life. This participation not only enhances the quality of the final decisions, but also increases the odds that the client will implement his/her part of the plan.
- Team decision-making allows for shared responsibility for the consequences of important decisions.
- Team decision-making lessens the possibility of individual bias and error by incorporating a natural system of checks and balances.
- The team approach promotes focusing on the total problem, rather than only on segments. All of the parts fitting into a whole is therefore more likely to emerge from team decision-making as compared with individual decision-making.
- The team approach allows for the effective inclusion of specialized knowledge into the total case plan, yet puts that specialized knowledge into perspective.
- Because the team approach requires the development of mutual goals and plans, there tends to be increased commitment to those goals and plans by team members.
- The team approach encourages personal growth via the sharing of ideas among persons with different values and backgrounds.
- The team approach encourages better communication between professionals and paraprofessionals involved in the same case.

The Disadvantages of Working in a Team

There are a number of disadvantages of working in a team. The ones most frequently encountered are:

- Team meetings are more time-consuming than individual decision-making or case consultation.
- If everyone is equal, and participates equally in the team, then decisions may take longer to make, so that everyone can express his/her opinion and ideas, and all ideas can be discussed thoroughly.
- Effective team decision-making depends on clear communication so that all issues are understood by all team members. Clear communication takes time and may be very difficult to attain, especially if team members are from different backgrounds.
- If team decisions result in a case treatment plan involving numerous persons, there is a high risk of fragmentation of services.
- Some people find it difficult to speak out in a group, either because they are shy, not confident in their own opinions, or are afraid of other team members.

On the whole, child welfare workers have found working in teams to be a useful way of delivering services to children and their families. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages and, most importantly, the team approach includes an opportunity for the clients of all ages to take an active part in planning for solutions to their social problems or circumstances.

Exercise

List three advantages of team decision-making:

1.

2.

3.

Identify two factors that are different about team decision-making as opposed to an individual decision-making.

1.

2.

Summary

Decision-making in teams can improve the quality of decisions as well as increase the team member's commitment to the decisions. Team decision-making offers both advantages and disadvantages to the team member.

Unit Five

PREPARING YOUR CASE FOR TEAM DECISION-MAKING

Just give us the facts!

Unit Five

PREPARING YOUR CASE FOR TEAM DECISION-MAKING

Whether you are getting ready for a staffing or a team meeting, preparation is necessary in order to insure that decisions made by the group are the best possible for the child and family involved. The purpose of this section is to help you plan for such meetings by reviewing and updating your case record.

Objective

To give the child welfare worker a process for preparing a case for a team meeting.

Reviewing the Case Record

In order for a team to make good decisions, it must have complete, accurate, and easily understandable facts about the situation. Therefore, you must plan to spend considerable time before the team meeting getting and organizing facts regarding the case. In order to insure complete case data, be sure to:

-Update all case recording.

-Make sure all external reports are in, such as reports from the pediatrician or the psychologist, etc.

-Follow-up on earlier situations, such as judicial or legal dispositions, referrals, and ideas or committments from previous staffings.

In order to insure accurate information, be sure to

-Make collateral contacts to verify the client's facts.

-Check past records against recent reports.

-Reconcile differences.

-Use personal contacts, impressions, and experiences to verify reports.

Obtaining accurate information is particularly important with childen since false labeling can have such a detrimental effect on them. Child welfare clients frequently test below their capacity for a variety of reasons. It is important not to label a child 'retarded' solely on one indicator if all other indicators reveal normal potential.

In order to be able to present the case to other members of the team so they can easily grasp the necessary information, be sure to:

-Review the case record.

-Organize all reports, such as legal documents.

-Prepare a social summary of the critical information for distribution before or at the team meeting. Do not devote much time to ancient history.

-Review who's who in the client system and how they are related, go over the order of events or chronology of the case (and fill in the gaps).

-Discuss the case with your supervisor, particulary for gaps and omissions.

-Outline the decision(s) to be made by the team. Indicate pros and cons for each decision(s) and resources.

Voluminous cases are frequently very difficult to present because of the number of people involved over a period of years. A simple, hand drawn chart indicating the family members and their involvement can be of help in orienting team members. As the

unit cartoon indicates, the team members want the facts not all of the family history.

Exercise

Please indicate three things that you as the worker can do to prepare a case for a team meeting.

1.

2.

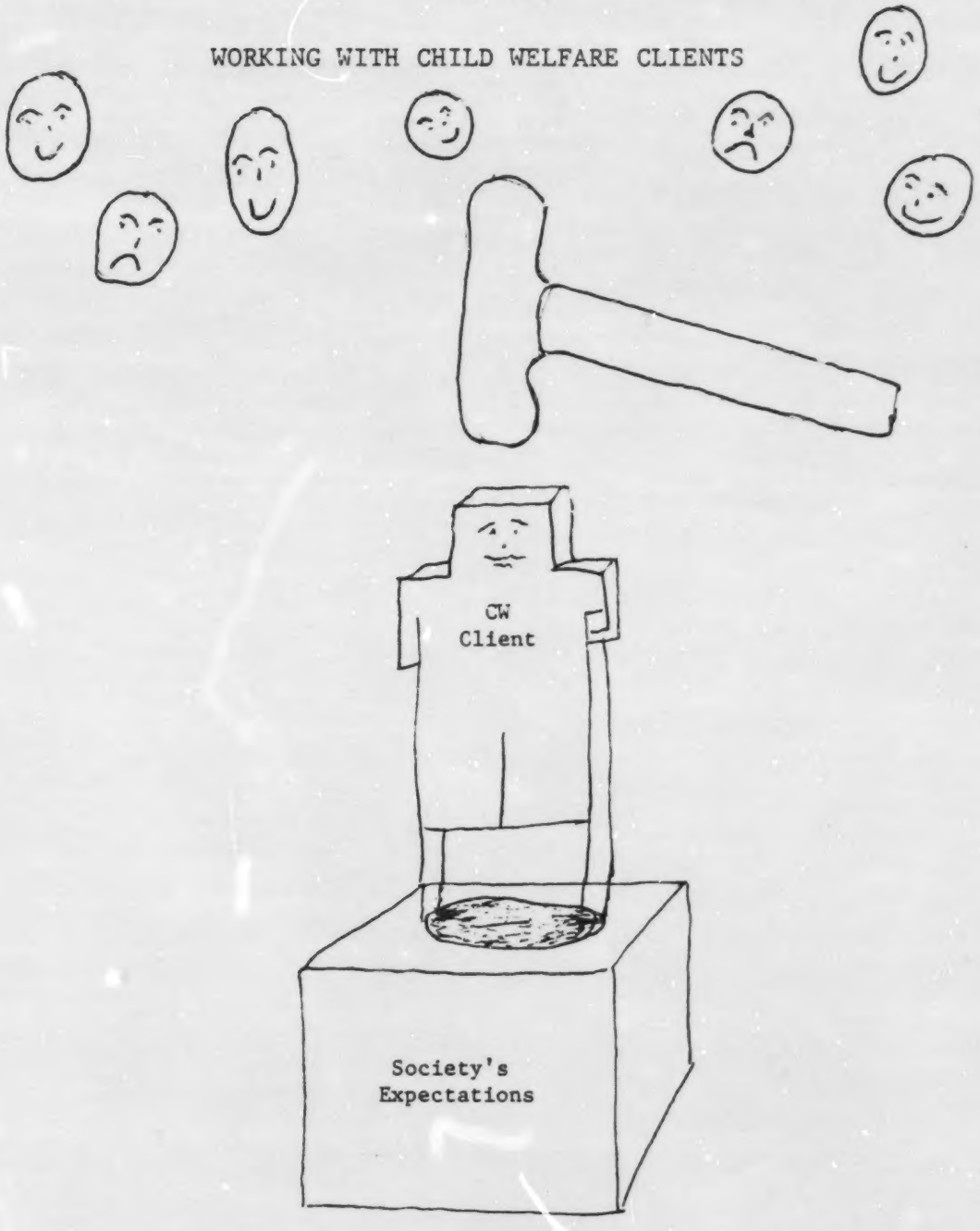
3.

Summary

Preparing your case is essential whenever you are getting ready for a staffing or a team meeting. Good preparation helps insure effective team decision-making.

UNIT SIX

WORKING WITH CHILD WELFARE CLIENTS



Unit Six

WORKING WITH CHILD WELFARE CLIENTS

Child welfare clients, for the most part, are involuntary. Society, through your agency, is telling them that they must change or risk losing their children. Such choice is frequently seen as a threat, and most of us would react defensively if faced with it. Therefore, working with child welfare clients puts some fairly unique demands on you. This section is aimed at helping you understand what to expect from your relationship with the clients, and how to involve your clients in the decision-making process that will affect them and their children.

Objectives

To help you, the child welfare worker, understand what to expect from your relationship with your client.

To help you prepare your child welfare clients to participate in the team decision-making process.

Your Relationship with Your Client

Those of us in the helping professions tend to have a need to be liked by those with whom we work. Unfortunately, as in some aspects of child welfare, helping people often means making them confront things about their own behavior which must be changed. Forcing such a confrontation is a sure ticket to losing popularity contests. While there are certainly good and bad strategies for motivating change, it is unrealistic for the worker to expect his

clients to like him under such circumstances. Therefore, accepting the fact that people will not necessarily like you, despite your good intentions, is part of being a professional in this field. You are a natural target for the client's very real anger, fear, and hostility. Your role is to help the client express and accept those feelings so he/she can go beyond them to become better parents. Your success is defined by changes in the clients' parenting behavior, not by how the client feels about you.

It is important to acknowledge the client's feelings of anger, hostility, and hurt. Helping the client to identify and express negative feelings verbally is often a necessary prerequisite to owning a problem and beginning to solve it. The focus of your relationship with the client should therefore be an acceptance of his feelings and an active focusing on behavior and support for behavioral change. Helping the client learn how to change is an important part of your work.

Preparing the Client to Participate in Decision-Making

The parents of the child and the child, where possible, are key participants in decision-making. So are you. However, the clients have two major disadvantages. First, it is the clients as the parents who are being asked to change; they are therefore on the defensive. Second, they are probably not used to working in a team in a bureaucracy; in other words, they don't know what to expect. It is your job to help them know what to expect from the team meeting and learn how to participate. It is also your job to help them understand how to use the team decision-making process to their

own benefit. As long as they are going to be making some changes, those changes might as well be to their liking. The changes might as well make their lives a little easier or more pleasant.

How do you do that? Unfortunately, there are no magic formulas, but we can give you some suggestions.

In order to get the commitment to participate in the team, the following methods are useful.

- The client needs to understand the reason for the team meeting. He needs to understand that at the team meeting decisions will be made about the future of his child(ren) and how and when things will happen to insure that future.
- The client also needs to understand that his opinions and information are important in making these decisions. Clients are considered key participants and their ideas are needed. In order to make the clients believe you, it is important that you be honest and open with the clients about any decisions that have already been made. If the client is hesitant, be sure to acknowledge that what you are asking her to do is not easy and may be very frightening. Reiterate that your agency's concern is one she shares--the well-being of her child. Emphasize that, since a decision is going to be made about her child, it is very important that she help make that decision in order for her needs to be met.
- It may be necessary to give the client some time to think about whether or not to participate prior to making a

commitment. Therefore, several client contacts may be needed to discuss the idea of team decision-making and prepare her emotionally to make the commitment to participate.

Once a client has decided to participate in a team meeting, the child welfare worker should:

- Review the general purpose of the team meeting.
- Define the specific purpose of the meeting as follows:

  To confirm with the parents the receipt of the complaint

  To confirm the results of the investigation

  To state the problems that were identified

  To convey to the parents the agency's goal of protecting the child in his own home without neglect or abuse recurring

  To afford the parents an opportunity to verbalize their problem and to explain how the agency can provide services

  To allow for explorations of all avenues to correct the problems

  To review with the parents their rights and responsibilities as parents

  To review the responsibilities of the agency for protection of their children in their own home

  To formalize the Treatment Plan which shall be dated and signed by the parents, worker, Team Leader, and supervisors present

  To set the date for the next conference.

The child welfare worker should inform the client that in the team meeting the client will have an opportunity to learn why the agency is concerned and to talk about their problems and express how they, the clients, would like the agency to help them solve the problems. The clients can do this by:

- Participating in identifying solutions to the problems identified by both the agency the client.
- Helping to decide which solutions to try (the Treatment Plan).
- Help to decide what time periods to work within.
- Sign a contract which reflects these agreements.

The child welfare worker should help the client know what to expect at the meeting by:

- Telling the client who will be at the team meeting, and why.
- Giving some hints about the people in terms of what they look like ("the guy with glasses and grey hair") and any relevant personality traits ("she's quiet but when she says something it's usually worth listening to") to help the client feel more comfortable.
- Making sure the client knows when and where the team meeting is. Arrange for transportation, if necessary.
- Planning to meet the client a few minutes before the meeting begins so you can introduce the client to all participants.
- Helping the client choose appropriate dress for the meeting.

Children who are to participate in a team meeting also need to be prepared regarding:

- the purpose of the meeting
- their role

Children must be dealt with in very concrete terms regarding what is going to happen to them at the team meeting. Care must be taken in assuring children of both the agency's concern for them as well as their parents, when appropriate. It is important to stress with the children that they are not to blame for what is happening. Encourage the children to bring a toy with them. Preparing the child is covered in more detail in the next unit.

Exercise

What are three things that you can do with your clients to help them to participate in the team decision-making process and the team meeting specifically?

1.

2.

3.

Summary

Because many of the child welfare clients are involuntary clients, the worker needs special skills to help involve these clients in the decision-making process. It is helpful to realize that your relationship with the client may not be viewed positively

by the client. As the worker you can help the clients to participate in the decision-making process which effects them and their children.

Unit Seven

PREPARING THE CHILD FOR THE TEAM MEETINGS

But, dear, you have to . . .

Unit Seven

PREPARING THE CHILD FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Deciding on whether to include the child in the team or not can be an important decision. Some workers prefer to include older children but exclude young children while other workers prefer to include both older and young children. Many workers believe even children under twelve months should be present both to remind the team participants of the actual client being discussed and to provide an opportunity for parents to assure themselves about the well being of their child. Even infants, or perhaps especially infants, do pick up on the expressions of concern for them. There are advantages and disadvantages to including children, especially young children, in the team meeting.

Once you have decided to include the child in the conference, some special preparation of the child is important. Therefore the goal of this unit is to help the child welfare worker in preparing the child for participation in the team conference.

Objectives

-To help you understand the special concerns the child may have.

-To help you prepare the child, both the older and younger child, to participate in the team decision-making process.

Special Concerns of Children

Children, especially younger children will pick up on the feelings of the people around them. This includes the feelings of the worker, parents, foster parents, and significant others. Therefore, it is critical that the child welfare worker do the

following:

-As the worker, get in touch with your own feelings. If you are anxious about the conference, because you fear the mother may show up drunk and cause a scene, the child will pick up on your anxiety but she won't understand why you are anxious. So it is important that you are aware how you really feel about the conference and why.

-Be honest with the child. This is crucial. Never lie to a child. You can and should use tact when dealing with a child, but never lie. If you are concerned about the conference, you could explain that you are a little nervous about the conference (as is the child), because you really care for him and want to make the very best decision for everyone. Or that this will be the first time that you, the child, his mother, foster parents, and Ms. Smith (supervisor) sit down togehter to talk, and you aren't even sure how that will go. Or whatever honest emotions or feelings you have, you should try to explain.

-Help the caretaker, mother, and foster parents to get in touch with their own feelings about the meeting and the possible decisions including those about separation.

-Remember that the more time you spend in preparation for an anticipated anxiety producing experience, such as going to the hospital, court, placement in foster care, and so on; the less time you have to spend afterwards. This means that good preparation reduces or minimizes the traumatic effects of the experience.

So it is important to plan to spend more time with the child before the conference. If you haven't met the child yet, you should plan to do so, so you won't be one of the strangers at the conference. If time doesn't permit your spending much time or any time with the child, you should help the parents to prepare the child and plan to meet a few minutes before the conference to answer any questions they may have. If time permits, you may even want to pick up the child and parents for the conference.

Preparing the Child for the Team Meeting

The Child Welfare system is one in which the victim ends up being removed from the home. If a man robs another man, it is the robber who is sent away. Not so in Child Welfare. If parents neglect or abuse the children seriously, it is the child who is sent away. Because of this process as well as the nature of the parent-child relationship it is the rare child (if any) who doesn't feel some "guilt" about his role in the family's involvement with Child Welfare. Frequently, parents will even tell the child, "that this is all your fault." So it is important throughout the whole process to try and alleviate the child's feelings of guilt. He is in fact the victim, not the offender. So keep in mind this underlying philosophy throughout all of the following suggestions on how to prepare the child for participation.

The child regardless of age will have two major concerns or questions:

-What will it be like in the team meeting?

-What will happen to him?

Preparing the Older Child

The older child can be prepared similarly to the process outlined in Unit 6 for preparing adult clients. Be sure to modify your techniques to be age appropriate. You can prepare them by explaining:

-The purpose of the meeting.

-Who will be present.

-The logistics of time, place, date.

-Their role.

-If they want to talk, help them prepare or think about what they want to say in the meeting.

-Outline the meeting as to format, length, process, etc.

It is most important for the child welfare worker to stress the agency's concern for the child as well as for his parents and brothers and sisters. The worker should try to get the child to discuss any fears he may have regarding what he might say in the meeting or the possible outcomes of the meeting. Bring up the possibilities that:

He could stay in foster care

He could be returned to parents

He could stay in foster care but visit parents, etc.

Preparing the Young Child

Since many workers have had less experience in preparing very young children for this type of participation, the following suggestions are geared to working with a young child of around five years. If the child is younger or older you can modify the techniques used. The main question the child usually has is - what will it be like?

In describing and explaining what it will be like, remember to use the same techniques you would use to prepare her to go to the hospital, court, etc. Start with what it will be like that day:

-Getting up, eating breakfast, dressing (school clothes, good clothes, play clothes) etc.

-Allow her to take favorite toys as a "security blanket"

-Going to school (if the meeting is after school or day care) or if it's in the morning, going straight there.

-How will they go - car? bus? worker pick them up?

-Describe the building, parking the car, etc.

-Who will be present, those she knows, those she doesn't.

-Describe the meeting.

-Discuss her role - will she be asked everything?

-Does she want to say anything?

A good way of handling this information would be to role play using puppets or dolls. In trying to help the child work through some of his fears, the worker could be the child in the role play and be the one asking questions and expressing fears.

During the meeting, you (assuming you know the child) should sit close to the child. You should expect the child to be a child - need a drink, go to the restroom, etc. This is normal, so plan on it. Also remember to take care of these things - drink, restroom- immediately before the meeting.

After the meeting (<u>this is essential</u>) allow some time for discussing the meeting. What the child saw, heard, perceived, etc. If you have time to go someplace like a restaurant for a "treat," this will work well for little kids and older children also. Keep in mind what they perceived, saw and heard can be very different

from what you, as an adult worker, saw, heard, and perceived.

Exercise

List three things the worker can do to prepare the young child for the team meeting.

1.

2.

3.

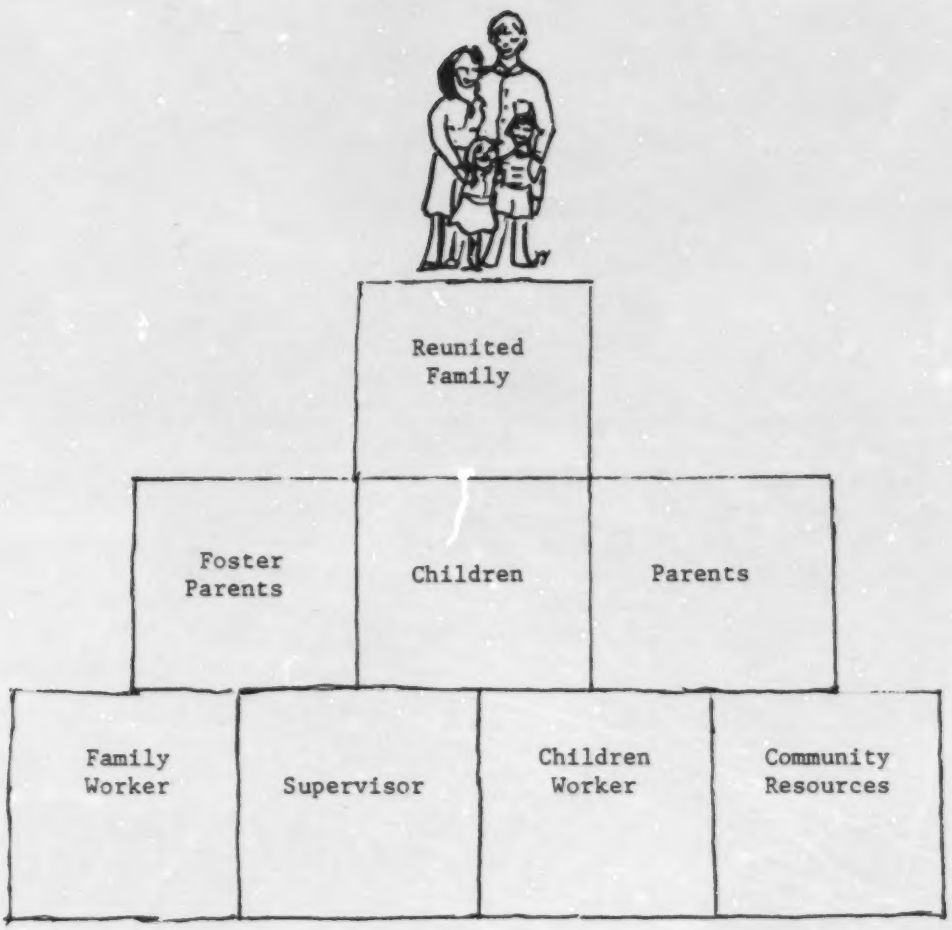
Add your own ideas on how you would prepare one of the children either a young child or an older child for a team meeting.

Summary

Children can be prepared to take an active part in a team meeting. The child welfare worker must spend time preparing the child, searching for feelings, and educating the child about the process.

Unit Eight

MAKING DECISIONS IN THE TEAM



All things together
make for better plans

Unit Eight

MAKING DECISIONS IN THE TEAM

Making decisions in conjunction with others involves the same problem-solving process that individual decison-making involves. There are some differences, however. The purpose of this section is to help you understand those differences in order to enhance your effectiveness as a team member.

Objective

To help you understand how team decision-making differs from individual problem-solving, and what you need to do that is different.

Team Decision-Making

Team decision-making involves two skills. First, it means you must be able to make decisions. We've already discussed that in depth. Second, in order to work effectively in a team, you must be able to articulate your ideas. Our previous discussion about planning for team meetings is aimed at helping you pull together your facts in order to communicate them clearly. In teams, being able to articulate your ideas is equally important as developing your decision-making skills. Your best tools are preparation, practice, and the confidence and knowledge that your ideas are important if the best possible decision is to be reached. You may need to learn to be assertive, even if you are shy or afraid.

While all decision-making involves planning for the future and following up on the plan, team decision-making usually results in more people being involved in implementing plans. Therefore, the need for careful followup and coordination between meetings is increased in team decision-making.

Since team decision-making involves the client, care must be made to translate into English the discussion so the client can truly participate. Abbreviations, technical language, and jargon should be avoided. Further steps must be made to make the client feel like a part of the team. Such steps can include: Introducing the client to other team members who may already know each other; not using language common only in the agency; clarifying policies which the client is unaware of; and asking for the client's opinion if he/she is not offering it spontaneously. You, the worker, should sit next to the client. If the client is not included in the total meeting, explain why to the client. Usually, this occurs when the team is considering other cases. Assure the client that other clients will not be involved in their situation.

Care must be taken in working in a team with regard to the issue of confidentiality. Information must not be received as confidential and then shared with the team. The easiest way to deal with this is to make it clear that information received may not be confidential from the team which includes the client. The differentiation must be made between staffings and team meeting when information is considered confidential.

One aspect of team decision-making may be conflict. Presentation of ideas which differ often promotes lively discussion and disagreement. If handled at the idea level and not the personal level, this can be a very productive way of problem-solving. Instead of shying away or giving in to a team member with strong opinions, it is important that you listen carefully, and participate if you have relevant facts or ideas.

Once all information and ideas have been presented and discussed, a decision must result. One pitfall in team decision-making is that the decision may not be the preferred one for some members. If this should occur, it is important not to sabotage the team decision simply because it wasn't your first choice. The decision reached may not be the preferred one for any of the team members, but it may be the only decision the law, resources, and/or client will accept. Team decisions are not perfect and even shared decisions must bow to the limitations of resources.

After team decisions are made, there may be the need to change them as a result of new information or events. The first step is the need to recognize the fact that the information or events demand a change of plans. Second, a decision must be made regarding whether to call a new team meeting or simply modify the plan. This decision should be a joint one with your supervisor and should reflect the magnitude of the proposed change. Either way, other team members should be informed.

Exercise

Name the two skills involved in team decision-making.

1.

2.

What are some of the things that have helped you most in the last team decision-making meeting?

Summary

Team decision-making involves the skills of individual decision-making and the ability to articulate your ideas. Your best tools are a well prepared case and clients, parctice, and the confidence and knowledge that your ideas are important if the best possible decision for the client is to be reached.

CONCLUSION

So that's the way decisions are made!

CONCLUSION

You have now had an opportunity to explore the many facets of the decision-making process both in individuals and in team decision-making. You have also had a chance to reflect upon your own style of decision-making, and you have been introduced to a systematic or problem solving approach to decision-making. You also have been able to look at the different skills required of workers who participate in team decision-making, as well as received some suggestions on how to prepare clients and their children for meaningful participation in the team-decision-making process.

If you feel more confident about your knowledge on how to approach difficult on the job situations which require decisions, this manual has accomplished its purpose. If on the other hand, you feel confused about certain areas, please use the work space below and make a list of the things or areas that you are confused about, then reread those units which deal with that area.

If you are still confused after your review of the units, please share your concerns with your supervisor, team leader, trainer or fellow employee so that they can help you to clarify any areas that remain unclear.

If you would like to know more about the nature of decision-making, consult Joseph D. Cooper's very readable text entitled The Art of Decision-Making. Robert Mayer and Peter Pipe in their amusing little paperback, Analyzing Performance Problems, outline the problem solving process very neatly. Frank Maple also considers decision making in his work on Shared Decision Making. The most popular and most readable paperback on teamwork is by Naomi Brill, Teamwork: Working Together in the Human Services.

Decision-making in Child Welfare is a difficult skill because of the many elements which need to be considered - the most important obviously the welfare of children. While there are no 'easy' child welfare decisions, we hope this brief description of the decision-making process will make the actual decision-making easier for the worker both as an individual and as a team member.

APPENDIX

BRAINSTORMING, CLUSTERING, AND RANKING

"Brainstorming is a technique for getting participants in an idea-seeking meeting to produce an unrestrained flow of ideas." No ideas are ridiculed. The basic idea is that you throw off all of your inhibitions and all of your preconditioned assumptions. Brainstorming encourages people to stick out their necks.

The rules for brainstorming are:

1. Don't criticize while ideas are flowing.
2. Encourage the wildest flow of ideas. It is easier to tame than to screen them.
3. Obtain as many ideas as possible to broaden the base for success.
4. Encourage piggy-packing on other ideas--building or adding to someone else's suggestions.
5. Allow 20 minutes for brainstorming of ideas.

After all ideas are listed on a blackboard or newsprint, go through and evaluate. Rule out illegal, immoral, or impossible ones. Then cluster the ideas.

"Clustering" refers to grouping related items together under common headings such as school problems, health problems, legal problems, etc.

After the ideas have been clustered into categories, prioritize by ranking the groups as to importance. Arbitrarily rank them on a scale of 1-10. Agree beforehand which numbers must be considered.

Selected Bibliography
on
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